

The Planning of Street and Highway Locations in Urban Areas

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No construction of any significant proportion can occur in any Michigan municipality unless and until an urban trunkline plan shall have been adopted. This is a policy established for the State of Michigan by the Highway Commissioner. It is not unlike the policy which I assume will soon be adopted by the Bureau of Public Roads, making the urban trunkline plan a prerequisite to the expenditure of Federal funds in any urban area.

I doubt if anyone here would take exception to the above mentioned policies, for there are obvious advantages which will accrue from their application. Such policies will go a long way in avoiding the programming and accomplishment of projects in urban areas which are inconsistent with local planning objectives and with local development and capital improvement programs.

In this period of urban redevelopment, a period which has been compared to the industrial revolution by virtue of its impact on the social and economic life in these United States, the objective of consistency with local plans and programs is fundamental to an urban trunkline plan.

In spite of the apparent advantages of the urban trunkline plan, its accomplishment raises some fundamental questions which should be of considerable interest to technicians charged with the responsibility for the development of urban trunkline plans. The questions bring out problems which are equally applicable to the planning of any specific street or highway location in an urban area, for the route planning of any street, highway, or expressway location in an urban situation is only a refinement to the design of the urban trunkline plan. Some of the questions suggested are: What is an urban trunkline plan? Who should be given the responsibility of the preparation of the urban trunkline plan? By whom will the urban trunkline plan be adopted? And what are the objectives of the urban trunkline plan?

Many of these require policy decisions. I discuss them only from the technician's standpoint, not as accepted policies of the Michigan State Highway Department or its Commissioner. It is still too early to say either that my preliminary reactions to these questions will not be considerably altered with greater experience, or that they will be unacceptable to policy makers; however, an informal discussion of these questions will be a good approach to the problem of planning street and highway locations in urban areas.

WHAT IS AN URBAN TRUNKLINE PLAN?

The Highway Department and road building agencies, have been prone to overlook one fundamental step in their efforts to accomplish the actual construction of a road project. I make reference to the fact that a plan implies documentation. Many of the plans, which have satisfied our past requirements, have never gotten any further than a sketch map or the recollection of their designer. Therefore, the urban trunkline plan is a documentary presentation, a statement of long-range trunkline objectives for an urban area. The documentation of these long-range objectives should illustrate two facts: (1) That there is mutual agreement between the local community and the highway development agency on presented trunkline objectives; and, (2) that the trunkline plan as presented is compatible and consistent with the existing plans, proposed development projects and capital improvement program of the local community. An urban trunkline plan which contains these two ingredients will provide a sound basis for the selection of projects for programming in the urban area.

WHO WILL PREPARE THE URBAN TRUNKLINE PLAN?

The Sagamora Conference on highways and urban development which brought together outstanding personages in the highway development and planning field in October of 1958, formulated and adopted some findings and recommendations which, answer in part, the question of who will prepare the urban trunkline plan.

Stated in the conclusions and recommendations of the Sagamora Conference is the following, and I quote:

"State highway departments, in cooperation with local government, should develop a tentative program of urban highway improvement for a period of at least five years in advance as a basis for planning at the local level. This program should be in accordance with a jointly agreed upon long-range plan. . . .

State highway departments should consult with local authorities on a continuing basis in highway planning. . . . "In cases where local government has not yet initiated community planning, the State should take the responsibility for initiating planning."

I am confident that we would all be in agreement that the urban trunkline plan should be the joint product of the local community and the State highway department. But who will represent the participating agencies on the technical level? Certainly in states where there is available planning enabling legislation on the basis of which local government can establish local planning processes, these processes and the resultant planning agencies should be respected in the development of the urban trunkline plan. In Michigan, this would mean that any community which has availed itself of the planning opportunities of the enabling legislation; and as a consequence established a local planning commission, should be represented in the urban trunkline preparation by the planning commission and its staff. In the Michigan State Highway Department, the planning division of the Department has accepted the responsibility on behalf of the Highway Commissioner, to be the state agency participating in the development of the urban trunkline plan. The Planning Division is one of three divisions in the Office of Planning and is a recommending agency to the policy makers along with its sister divisions of programming and route location.

Thus, two agencies in Michigan which would need to cooperate on the development of an urban trunkline plan are the local planning commission and the planning division of the State Highway Department. I believe that this is a reasonable association between these two agencies. According to Michigan planning enabling legislation, the local planning commission stands in the same relationship to the local legislative body as does the Planning Division of the Highway Department to the highway policy makers. In each case, the planning body is a recommending agency; a local planning commission making recommendation to its local legislative body and the Planning Division of the Michigan State Highway Department recommending to the State Highway Commissioner. Of course, the planning representative of the highway agency will vary with the organizational difference which exists between these agencies. Thus, it can be seen that the urban trunkline plan is a common conclusion of two recommending agencies. As such, it represents a framework from which projects can be selected for programming and construction.

When a project is ready for programming it will still be necessary in Michigan, that the local legislative body's approval of the project be obtained. This will include agreement to participate in the financing where this is necessary and agreement to accept any streets that will revert to local jurisdiction as a consequence of the construction project. These final agreements can be pursued with greater surety if based on the planning conclusions of a mutually acceptable urban trunkline plan.

BY WHOM WILL THE URBAN TRUNKLINE PLAN BE ADOPTED?

Although there may be general agreement on the parties who should have the responsibility for the preparation of the urban trunkline plan, there still remains considerable debate as to whom should adopt the plan. These questions result from a confusion in the local planning process. Although Michigan enabling legislation provides that the establishment of a planning commission includes the delegation of the responsibility for the preparation of the master plan, not all communities that have so established planning commissions have been willing to delegate the full responsibility for the preparation of the master plan.

As a consequence, the local legislative body retains an interest, and even on occasion, inserts itself into the adoption procedure of the master plan. This is quite inconsistent with the intent of the enabling legislation; and where this practice has been followed, it has succeeded in confusing the planning program. So far in contacts with local communities, we have been successful in selling the fact that the local planning agency should be the adopting agency for the urban trunkline plan. This has been achieved in many cases by illustrating that the final approval still remains with the local legislative body at the time of any project programming. The resolution which we have been using in our urban trunkline plan simply establishes the nature of the two participating agencies; i.e., the local planning commission and the planning divisions and sets forth their responsibilities in relationship to the urban trunkline plan and then asserts that the trunkline plan, as presented, is consistent with and compatible to the long-range planning and development objectives of the local community.

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES TO THE URBAN TRUNKLINE PLAN?

This question has been covered in the other questions discussed. The urban trunkline plan as we are presently attempting it in the

Michigan State Highway Department manifests two achievements. First, it illustrates the level of agreement which has been obtained between the planners of the local agency and the State Highway Department. It is not always possible to obtain complete agreement on long-range planning objectives especially where the source of financing for these objectives is unforeseen. This does not mean that long-range objectives cannot be illustrated in the urban trunkline plan. For example, one Michigan municipality has developed a plan for their central business district not unlike some of the envisionary plans that have been conducted elsewhere around the country. We do not take exception to such a broad vision of the future of the central business district. Personally, I seriously doubt whether some will ever be accomplished, at least to the scale of the presentation. The trunkline plan in this case would simply illustrate that the proposed arrangement of trunklines is consistent with the development of such a long-range proposal or would not pre-empt its ultimate accomplishment.

The second objective of the urban trunkline plan is to illustrate the arrangement of trunklines is an integral element in the development plan for the community and should be tied in with such plans and programs as a parking plan, a central business district redevelopment plan, and any proposed urban renewal projects or redevelopment programs. The urban trunkline plan should be integrated with the land use plan, and the zoning plan as it attempts to effectuate that land use plan, especially now as we begin to appreciate that traffic control will require fundamental land use control and regulation.

What is necessary to accomplish such a program as I have outlined in the requirements for an urban trunkline plan? Again, as has been suggested in the conclusions of the Sagamora Conference, the fundamental requirement is comprehensive planning, both in the local community and in the highway agency. The demand for decision in regard to the huge highway building program has found local communities, often times with planning agencies of long history, unable to provide the necessary information, or come to necessary conclusions which would permit the proper integration of the highway facilities in the overall development and redevelopment program of the city. On the other hand, in the Highway Department we have lacked an understanding and a sensitivity to the local planning and development problem. In this regard it may come as a surprise for you to recognize that transportation is not the major problem of the urban area. Another thing that should be kept in mind is that the American

city is now in a state of transition, the extent of which is often misinterpreted within the community itself. These, plus many collateral problems of management, financing, jurisdictional problems, should be understood by highway people as they attempt to develop an urban trunkline plan.

The Michigan State Highway Department, in an effort to become more sensitive to urban requirements, has initiated several programs and projects. In this regard, I am not the only urban planner now employed by the Department, besides the addition of new people who are urban planning oriented, we have initiated a mutual planning assistance program which is directed to an exchange of information, skills, and viewpoints.

Perhaps the most interesting of our new planning experiences has been the development of a "Highway Planning Report Checklist," developed as a specification to apply to expressway planning studies being conducted by outside agencies for the Department. In order that all the features of urban development and planning be taken into account, a list was prepared which enumerated all the considerations which should apply. Also illustrated the study approach which should be followed in the selection of a proposed alignment and design for two expressways, revolving around a comparative analysis. Once having established the general characteristics of the proposed route it is suggested that all alternative proposals be evaluated, and through a process of elimination, two or more alternates be selected. The alternate routes are then analyzed by the application of the items enumerated in the checklist. Not only did we adopt the planning report checklist as an outline for the study programs for the two expressways in Detroit, but we accompanied it with a time schedule and a reporting procedure. We, the Michigan State Highway Department, who have been participating in this, are confident that as a consequence of this procedural outline a sound planning conclusion will be reached with sufficient documentation and substantiation to convince all participating units of government.

Some early successes which we have had on the expressway problems in Detroit reaffirm our confidence that the application of urban planning criteria and techniques can define sound alignment and design for an urban trafficway.